

AFRICAN DANCE IN GHANA: CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS

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Nii-Yartey as remembered by ‘H’ Patten, Koromanti Arts

Francis Nii-Yartey, founder of the *National Dance Company* and *Noyam Contemporary African Dance Institute* devoted many decades to developing and distilling a vast array of traditional African dance and music vocabularies, storytelling techniques, and symbolisms into ground-breaking contemporary African dance-theatre spectacles.

Nii's choreographic works have thrilled numerous audiences, conveying dynamic and compelling contemporary stories outlining the plight, pride, endurance, humour, ingenuity, strength and the underlying spiritual attributes of African peoples through the medium of dance.

Having worked with Nii as my mentor, father, brother and close friend, this book illuminates many of the boundaries Nii was forced to both push past and through, against some harsh criticisms in the early years, whilst developing and refining his choreographic practice. As a true visionary, Nii endured, and developed many cutting-edge contemporary dance-theatre pieces, gaining an incredible reputation as one of Africa's foremost choreographers. Through the countless number of artists trained, moulded and having crafted their own artistic skills through Nii's hands, his work has impacted the development of African dance practice worldwide. Having collaborated with many major choreographers across Africa, the diaspora and the

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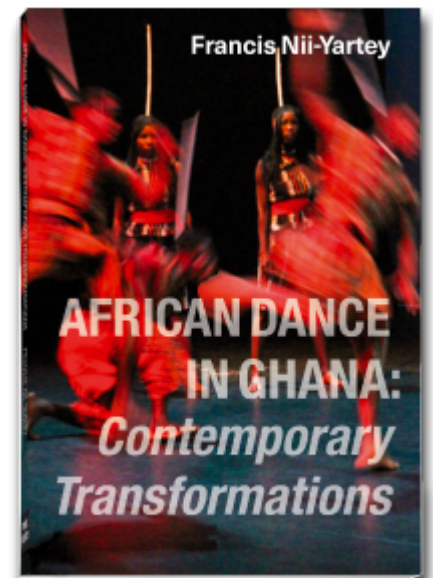

Through his Ghanaian lens, Nii reveals the major elements that form what he termed 'choreographic

pillars', which constitute the foundational guiding principles in the creation of traditional and contemporary African dance vocabulary. Nii's 'pillars' also establish the key creative and aesthetic themes, the encoded and embodied signs and symbols that enable the reading of meaning within African dance practices, both traditional and contemporary.

This important book provides unique insight into the challenges African choreographers endure and must overcome as part of the creative process, from a practitioner perspective. Nii highlights the functions, the

lasting legacy for generations of artists to come.

Additionally, in this book, perhaps for the first time, readers are provided with a real window into the 'outdooing' (naming and presenting) of African dance both ancient and new, within the traditional setting, on the concert stage and in the studio context. Nii generously foregrounds the processes, thinking, approaches and encoded symbolisms that provide meaning in the production of African dance expression, making it an invaluable text for dance practitioners, choreographers, arts teachers and the general public alike.



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